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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a student/faculty survey on the academic advising process at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and highlights issues in improving the advising process. The survey included 195 recent graduates, 269 existing students, and 207 faculty and professional advisors. The study found that 70.8% of students were satisfied or very satisfied with the academic advising services provided. Students felt, however, that there was little effort from advisors or faculty to get to know them as individuals. Based on research that student-faculty interaction has a stronger relationship to student satisfaction with the college experience than any other student or institutional characteristic, it is concluded that ways to encourage greater personal contact between faculty and students should be found. (Includes five references). (JDD)

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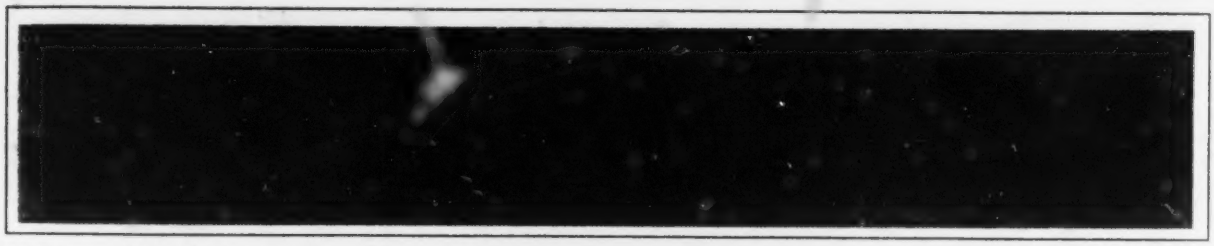

Vol. 1 No. 3 April, 1988

QUALITY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AT UNO: RESULTS OF STUDENT AND FACULTY SURVEYS

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QUALITY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AT UNO: RESULTS OF STUDENT AND FACULTY SURVEYS

Ad Hoc Committee Report

Introduction

The issue of academic advising has received considerable attention within academic circles in recent years. Its impact on student retention has been documented, as has the relationship between students' positive feelings towards their university experiences and their perception of the quality of academic advising they received. Recent studies would support the conclusion that good academic advising programs yield significant benefits to students as well as to the university. Few would doubt the significance of academic advising having a positive impact on the student and his or her academic or professional success, and on the university in terms of its reputation and ability to attract and retain students.

With these thoughts in mind, the University of Nebraska at Omaha established a committee to review the academic advising process and offer recommendations, where appropriate, to improve the overall quality of this critical university function. The purposes of this report are to present the results of a comprehensive student/faculty survey, and to highlight issues which might be addressed in improving the advising process.

At the outset, it is essential to restate certain conclusions regarding academic advising as related by Grites. First, **academic advising cannot be done in isolation.** The successful advising program or individual relationship does not occur in the limited confines of the advisor's office. Without the awareness and use of other campus personnel, services, and resources, both the advisor and advisee are limited in their growth and effectiveness. To use one's own personal skills and resources, other resource centers and advisors, and students themselves is to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the advising process. Success in this area requires a concerted effort that has been carefully and systematically planned. It will not happen simply because the components of a system appear to be present in a given environment (Mash, 1978).

Members of the Committee were: Marilyn M. Leach (Chairperson), Coordinator, Center for Faculty Development; J. Brad Chapman, Professor, College of Business Administration; Gordon Hansen, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences; John D. Langan, College of Education; and David Hinton, Dean, College of Public Affairs and Community Service (unexpired term completed by Joanne A. Lofton, Coordinator, College of Public Affairs and Community Service).

Second, **there is no single formula for successful academic advising.** Each institution must decide on its own appropriate delivery system and the extent to which other campus resources can be integrated into the advising process. Each advisor must decide which techniques, skills, and other resources will be used most effectively with each student. Furthermore, when a successful approach is determined, continued inquiry, adaptations, and enhancements of that approach need to be explored; the advising process can never afford to become stagnant.

Third, **the role of academic advising in the future of higher education will become more prominent.** Facing projected enrollment declines, institutions have concentrated on retaining the students they enroll. **The advising process has proven effective in the effort, i.e., more effective advising yields higher retention rates. Future trends indicate even more reasons to concentrate on academic advising as a retention process.** The investment in a college education continues to result in higher lifetime earnings and more productive members of society; therefore, economic and social benefits accrue from the retention of college students (Grites, 1979, p. 41.)

The focus of this report is on establishing a "benchmark" of student and faculty perceptions regarding the delivery of academic advising at UNO. No attempt is made to evaluate specific college practices, except to note where differences in delivery have a significant impact on perceived quality. Also, it should be noted that progress has been made since 1978 with respect to academic advising. For example, results of a student survey conducted by the Educational and Student Services staff indicate the positive responses to the question "Was the individual academic advising in your college or major department helpful to you?" increased from 37% agree in 1978 to 53% agree in 1986 (Davis, 1986). However, specific aspects of the quality and delivery of academic advising at UNO need to be documented. Additionally, individuals for each college are encouraged to review the data collected which relate to their advising efforts.

In an attempt to assess perceptions of academic advising, students and faculty were asked to respond to a 26-item questionnaire. The responses reported in this document are drawn from the following:

- All December 1986 graduates (195 responses)
- Random, stratified sample of existing UNO students (269 responses)
- Faculty and professional advisors (207 responses)

Presentation of Data

A complete printout of the responses and the cross-tabulations for selected questions, as well as responses to the open-ended questions, is available in the Center for Faculty Development (A & S Hall 217). Items of descriptive data are given in Tables 1 and 2. The percentage distribution of responses for all three samples is presented in Tables 3 and 4.

TABLE 1
STUDENT SURVEY

	Category	CURRENTLY ENROLLED (N=269) (%)	DECEMBER 1986 Graduates (N=195) (%)
1.	Your College:		
	A. Arts and Sciences	21	24
	B. Business Administration	21	24
	C. Continuing Studies	27	8
	D. Education	13	11
	E. Engineering and Technology	9	7
	F. Fine Arts	3	1
	G. Public Affairs and Community Service	2	12
	H. University Division/Graduate	4	13
2.	Sex:		
	A. Male	47	43
	B. Female	53	55
3.	Age:		
	A. 17-21	17	2
	B. 22-30	43	66
	C. 31-40	27	19
	D. 40 and over	13	13
4.	Class:		
	A. Freshman	10	-
	B. Sophomore	26	-
	C. Junior	33	-
	D. Senior	31	-
	E. Graduate	-	-
5.	Hours Enrolled:		
	A. 6 or less	41	-
	B. 7-11	16	-
	C. 12 or more	43	-
6.	Employment:		
	A. 20 hours or less	21	-
	B. 21-30 hours	13	-
	C. 31 hours or more	44	-
	D. Not employed	22	-

TABLE 2
FACULTY SURVEY

CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION
College:	
Arts and Sciences	41
Business Administration	13
Continuing Studies	1
CPACS	10
Education	17
Engineering	9
Fine Arts	8
University Division	1
Rank:	
Professor	24
Associate Professor	27
Assistant Professor	27
Instructor	15
Academic Advising (Mgr/Prof)	6

TABLE 3

REVIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING
(CURRENTLY ENROLLED STUDENTS AND 1986 GRADUATES)

Question	Percent Response	
	Currently enrolled (N=269)	1986 graduates (N=195)
Have you met with an academic advisor during the past 12 months?		
Yes	90	96
No	10	4
My main reason for seeing an advisor during the past two semesters has been:		
Required signature	33	37
Course selection and advice	61	53
Personal problem	0	2
Career advisement	3	7
Change in major	3	0
When I go to my advisor, I find that he/she is:		
Always available	16	8
Usually available	41	54
Seldom available	6	4
Available by appointment	32	32
Not available at a convenient time	5	3
My advisor's knowledge of requirements for my major program should be rated as:		
Good/Very Good	81	80
Poor/Very Poor	3	7
My advisor's knowledge of general University requirements should be rated as:		
Good/Very Good	79	76
Poor/Very Poor	2	8
The effort my advisor shows in trying to know me as an individual should be rated as:		
Good/Very Good	47	60
Poor/Very Poor	23	22
My advisor's assistance is helping me plan my program for future semesters has been:		
Good/Very Good	57	61
Poor/Very Poor	17	15
After seeing my advisor, the time with him/her is:		
Beneficial/Very Beneficial	62	63
Somewhat/Not Beneficial	39	37
My advisor refers me to other appropriate sources of information and assistance:		
Always/most of the time	36	42
Some of the time/never	41	41
All things considered, I would give my advisor a grade of:		
A	39	40
B	31	33
C	18	14
D	9	10
F	3	2
Rate the University catalog:		
Very Useful/Useful	76	81
Useful but Confusing/Not Useful	27	19

TABLE 3 (continued)
REVIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING
(CURRENTLY ENROLLED STUDENTS AND 1986 GRADUATES)

Question	Percent Response	
	Currently enrolled (N=269)	1986 graduates (N=195)
The material distributed by my major department to describe its programs and requirements is:		
Very Informative/Informative	57	61
Somewhat Informative/Not Useful	34	31
I visit formally/informally with faculty regarding my course selections:		
Frequently	7	14
Occasionally	30	46
Seldom	38	25
Never	26	15
Personally I consider the need to meet on a regular basis with an academic advisor to be:		
Very Important/Important	62	66
Somewhat Important/Not Important	38	34
All things considered, I would give my major program's advising efforts a rating of:		
Very Good/Good	64	66
Poor/Very Poor	11	13
Efforts should be made to improve the advising function at UNO:		
Yes	56	55
No	44	45

December 1986 Graduates and Currently Enrolled Students

Table 1 summarizes descriptive data and Table 3 gives the questionnaire responses of the December 1986 graduates and currently enrolled students. In looking at the two samples, it is interesting to note the similarity of responses to selected items regarding academic advising, shown in Table 3. The one exception involves the extent of interaction with faculty. Of the 1986 graduates, 60 percent responded they had frequent or occasional contact with faculty regarding course selection, while only 37 percent of the currently enrolled students indicated this level of faculty interaction. Apparently, as students approach graduation, their level of contact with faculty regarding course selection increases, or those who stay are more likely to see an advisor.

The two main reasons students report for seeing an advisor are for course selection and advice (61%, 53%) or securing a required signature (33%, 37%). If advisor signatures were not required by many of the colleges, one might speculate the number of students seeing an advisor (90%, 96%) would decrease considerably. This is particularly apparent when one considers that only 62 percent of the 1986 graduates reported that they considered the *need* to meet on a regular basis with an academic advisor as very important or important. Based on student perceptions, this raises the questions of the role of the academic advisors (signature provider or advice provider), and the amount of time and effort devoted to advising (sign forms or discuss issues of importance).

Since this is an initial study, there is no basis on which to compare the responses with past surveys or to compare to any set of normative data in making an evaluation. However, one can make the following positive conclusions in a general sense:

- Advisors are available to the students. Only 5 percent of the currently enrolled students and 3 percent of the 1986 graduates indicate advisors are not available at a convenient time.
- Advisors' knowledge of major program and University requirements is generally very good or good (approximately 80 percent).
- A majority of students (more than 70 percent) give their advisor a grade of A or B.
- A majority of students (more than 76 percent) rate the University catalog as useful or very useful.

Although not negative in any sense, the following data indicate areas where student perceptions are lower than one would want, or they at least indicate where some attempts at improvement should be made:

- Approximately 23 percent of the students rate their advisor's efforts to know them as an individual as poor or very poor.
- The advisor's assistance in helping the student plan his or her program for future semesters is rated poor or very poor by approximately 16 percent of the students.
- Approximately 38 percent of the students surveyed rate the time spent with the advisor as only somewhat or not beneficial.
- Forty percent of the December 1986 graduates and 64 percent of the currently enrolled students report they seldom or never visit either formally or informally with faculty on course selection.
- Fifty-six percent of the currently enrolled students and 55 percent of the 1986 graduates indicate that efforts should be made to improve the advising function at UNO.
- Eleven percent of the currently enrolled students and 13 percent of the 1986 graduates indicate they would give their major program's advising efforts a rating of poor or very poor.

In an attempt to gain greater insight into the issues of academic advising, cross-tabulations were run on each of the questions in the survey. Although the cell sizes were too small to achieve significance, a number of tendencies were apparent in the data. The more important ones are:

- Although the delivery systems are somewhat different for each college, the responses did not vary markedly across colleges in any of the response areas.
- All of the currently enrolled students and 98 percent of the 1986 graduates who rated their advisor's efforts to know them personally as very good also gave them a "grade" of A or B. Conversely, 75 percent of the currently enrolled students and 60 percent of the 1986 graduates who rated their advisor's efforts to know them personally as poor gave them a "grade" of D or F.
- All of the currently enrolled students and all of the 1986 graduates who rated their advisor's efforts in helping them plan their programs as very good also gave them a "grade" of A or B. Conversely, the grade drops to D or F if the advisor's efforts are perceived to be very poor (75%, 86%).
- Sixty-seven percent of the currently enrolled students who attended a freshman orientation session rated it as useful or very useful.

Student responses to the open-ended questions generally support the item responses. Testimonials were given on good or bad experiences with advisors or faculty, or both. Some students expressed frustration with other University support services (e.g., financial aid, admissions, cashiering, registrar's office, etc.) and the negative feeling this left regarding their satisfaction with UNO. Concern was also expressed for more direct faculty interaction with students outside the formal classroom setting.

Faculty

Table 4 summarizes faculty and professional staff responses to selected items regarding academic advising. Again, no attempt is made to compare or contrast the different delivery systems, or to offer evaluation as to which approach — full-time advisors or faculty advisors — is the best or most preferred. Each has its unique advantages and disadvantages, and neither is immune from student criticism. Faculty responses to the questionnaire may have been influenced by the fact that they may or may not be involved in academic advising.

Forty-six percent of the faculty surveyed indicate that released time should be awarded for advising responsibilities, while 30 percent indicate that no special consideration need be given. There is also no clear consensus on who should perform academic advising. Thirty-one percent prefer a professional advisor, while 34 percent prefer a faculty member; 29 percent indicate some combination of professional advisor and faculty. Most faculty agree the UNO catalog is easy to use. A majority (79%) are of the opinion that students should meet with an advisor every semester.

There are apparently no significant needs on the part of advisors in such areas as more readily available student data, better evaluation system, or expanded advisor training. However, 57 percent of the faculty did indicate that better orientation regarding their role and responsibility in the advising process is needed. Perhaps since it's not perceived by the University community (administration) as a priority activity (at least not clearly articulated as such in the teaching, research, and service components of faculty evaluations), faculty tend to place relatively less emphasis on the advising process. For example, of those faculty with advising responsibility, 85 percent report they spend less than 10½ hours per week advising.

Consistent with student perceptions, the faculty identified the following three factors as being deemed the most important by students:

1. Advisors exhibit a personal and caring attitude toward advisees (89%).
2. Advisors are available (87%).
3. Advisors provide specific and accurate information (86%).

However, one must recognize the "flip-side" of the advising relationship — the student's responsibility. Forty-six percent of the faculty listed unprepared advisees as being somewhat or very problematic.

Responses to the open-ended questions were generally consistent with the items listed on the questionnaire. However, the following theme with respect to improving the advising process did come through:

- Faculty interaction with students outside the classroom setting is desirable and will benefit the student and the University.
- Special attention should be focused on freshmen and perhaps sophomore advising.
- Students drop out of the University because they perceive "no one cares."
- **The quality of academic advising will not improve significantly unless it is recognized and rewarded by the University as a priority activity.**

TABLE 4
REVIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING
FACULTY SURVEY

Question	Percent Response (N=207)
Based upon your personal knowledge and/or interactions with students, what is your assessment of the quality of academic advising offered students in your area?	
Very High/High Quality	54
Low/Very Low Quality	32
Indicate the three factors generally deemed most important by students in the advising process. (Select three)	
Advisors exhibit a personal and caring attitude toward advisees	89
Advisors are available	87
Advisors provide specific and accurate information	86
Do you have students assigned to you for academic advising?	
Yes	56
No	44
Approximately how many advisees do you have?	
0-20	44
21-50	34
51-100	10
101-300	6
300 and above	6
Approximately how many hours per week (on average) do you devote to student advising activities?	
1-10	85
11-20	9
21-30	3
31-40	3
Support services provided to assist me in advising (secretarial, record keeping, etc.) are:	
Very Adequate/Adequate	78
Inadequate/Very Inadequate	22
Incomplete records are:	
Very/Somewhat Problematic	42
Minor/Not Problematic	44
Evaluation of transfer credit is:	
Very/Somewhat Problematic	35
Minor/Not Problematic	45
Unprepared advisees:	
Very/Somewhat Problematic	46
Minor/Not Problematic	29
Too many advisees:	
Very/Somewhat Problematic	17
Minor/Not Problematic	63
I/we have developed our own advising materials to assist students.	
Yes	81
No	19
Having all colleges adopt the same general education requirements would significantly decrease the amount of time required for freshman/sophomore advising.	
Agree	33
Disagree	36
Don't know	31
More readily available data on students (e.g., abilities, interests, goals, etc.):	
High/Very High Need	38
Little/No Need	21

TABLE 4 (continued)
REVIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING
FACULTY SURVEY

Question	Percent Response (N=207)
Better orientation regarding their role and responsibility in the advising process:	
High/Very High Need	57
Little/No Need	10
More effective advisor selection process:	
High/Very High Need	28
Little/No Need	45
More effective evaluation of advisors and advising services:	
High/Very High Need	35
Little/No Need	27
Assignment of responsibility and accountability for advising services:	
High/Very High Need	37
Little/No Need	25
Expanded advisor training program/activities:	
High/Very High Need	31
Little/No Need	30
Advisees should be required to meet with their advisor:	
Every semester	79
Once per year	7
Only as needed	14
The UNO Catalog is:	
Very easy to use	4
Easy to use	50
Confusing/Inconvenient	16
Somewhat Confusing/Inconvenient	26
Very Confusing/Inconvenient	4
Academic advising should be performed in each college by:	
Professional advisor (B-line)	31
Faculty	34
Combination (first year, professional advisor; second year and beyond, faculty advisor)	29
No opinion	6
In what ways should faculty performing required advising activities be recognized/rewarded?	
Release time	46
Salary adjustments	10
Tenure and promotion consideration	7
Special awards (e.g., Excellence in Advising)	3
No "special" consideration; should be recognized as part of the total area of faculty responsibility.	30

Faculty and professional advisors recognize the importance of quality academic advising to the students and to the University, but have varying perspectives on the most effective delivery system. Obviously, any number of different approaches can yield satisfactory results, if the right people are doing the advising and adequate resources and rewards are provided. From the data, it is apparent the delivery systems employed in each of the colleges and department have definite positive and negative features.

Summary and Conclusion

A 1986 study by the Educational and Student Services staff at UNO reported that 70.8 percent of the UNO students surveyed were either satisfied or very satisfied with the academic advising services provided. This compares to a 67 percent norm for public colleges (Davis, 1986). However, the same study revealed that UNO students were significantly less satisfied (at the .05 level) than the national norm when it comes to con-

cern for students as individuals. The results of the study presented in this report reflect the same general attitudes. That is, students are not, for the most part, dissatisfied with the academic advising they are receiving; but at the same time they are not particularly satisfied with it, either. In their opinion, there is little effort from the advisors or faculty to get to know them as individuals, and many students view the time spent with advisors as not particularly beneficial.

This report could easily end here, with the conclusion that we're probably doing no worse or no better in providing academic advising services than most public institutions. However, that would eliminate the opportunity to draw a number of conclusions which, if addressed, would make a difference at UNO. The conclusions are:

- A majority of the students surveyed believe efforts should be made to improve the academic advising services at UNO.
- A majority of currently enrolled students seldom or never visit formally or informally with faculty regarding course selections.
- Efforts on the part of advisors to know advisees as individuals have a positive impact on the advisee's perception of the quality of advising.
- Advising cannot be done in isolation. This process must be integrated among all constituents of the institution to make the best possible use of all fiscal, physical, and human resources; there is no single formula for a successful advising program.
- With declining enrollments, increasing costs, and predicted shortages in portions of the professional labor force, institutions will focus even more strongly on the recruitment and retention of students. Academic advising has proven effective in the latter objective, and will be used as a total institutional process in the future (Grites, 1979, p. 2).
- **Student-faculty interaction has a stronger relationship to student satisfaction with the college experience than any other involvement variable or, indeed, any other student or institutional characteristic.** Students who interact frequently with faculty are more satisfied with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even administration of the institution. Finding ways to encourage greater personal contact between faculty and students might increase students' satisfaction with their college experiences (Astin, 1975).

The University of Nebraska at Omaha is somewhat unique in that students spend, on the average, only one hour per week on campus beyond class time (Davis, 1979). Unfortunately, this includes library time — a fact to which many of us can personally attest! Clearly, a majority of the students are not seeking out opportunities to interact with faculty or other University personnel, and the University is doing little to seek out the students. The intent here is not to cast aspersions, but to state the situation as it is perceived to be. It is not the intent to judge this relationship as being particularly bad; however, it certainly isn't as good as it could be and must be if we are to have a more positive impact on our students.

It should be of some concern to those interested in higher education that 64 percent of the currently enrolled students and 40 percent of the December graduates either seldom or never visit formally or informally with faculty regarding course selection. The real question is why. One's intuitive judgment would indicate the finger points in both directions. Students choose not to be on campus other than for classes, and faculty choose to pursue activities of a higher priority.

Many of the insights uncovered in this report are not new. Previous University studies dating back to 1974 have, based upon student opinion survey data, recommended increased availability of faculty to students, improved quality of nonclassroom faculty-student interaction, extended hours of operation for student services offices, improved quality of student interaction with student services personnel, and enlightened sensitivity to students in general. As mentioned previously, academic advising does not exist in a vacuum, but is an integral part of the larger whole of interaction between the student and the University. If we are to have an impact on student advising and student perceptions, each part of the University must focus on doing its job the best it can be done, and the overriding focus must be on quality education supported by a sincere interest in the student who wants to succeed.

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